

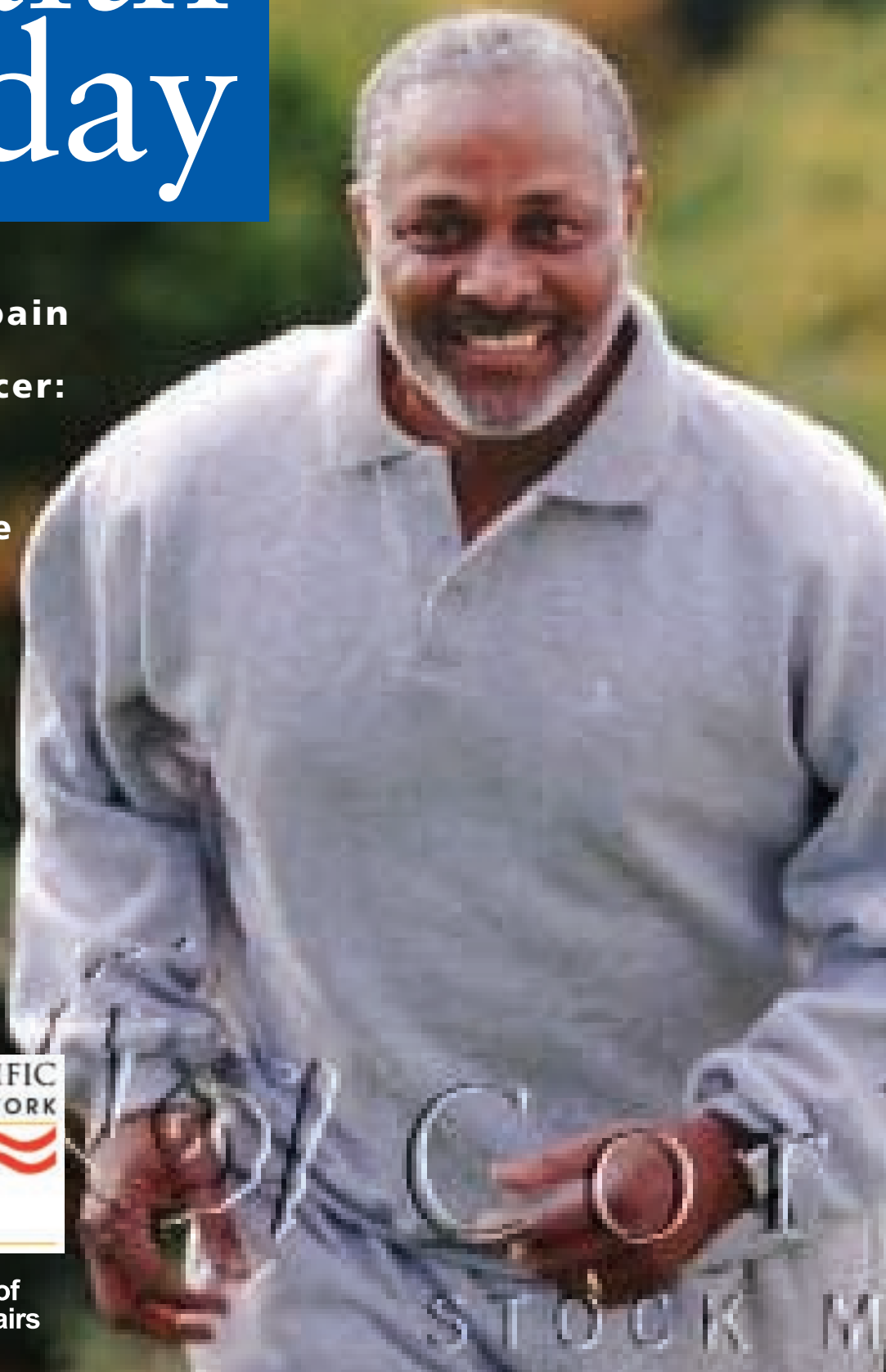
Veterans' Health Today

FALL 2002

Controlling pain

**Prostate cancer:
Early detection
saves lives**

**Taking charge
of diabetes**



Controlling pain

By Karen Carroll

Pain—we all experience it at one time or another in our life. Everyone knows how difficult it is to function with a headache, and people with moderate levels of pain can find it hard to work and care for their families. Extended pain can have a negative impact on every aspect of a person's life—interrupting sleep, decreasing appetite and prolonging recovery from an illness or injury. When pain becomes chronic, people lose their ability to enjoy life and may suffer from anxiety, fatigue and depression.

Advances in treatment

With new knowledge and medications that have come up over the past decade, great progress has been made in pain management. Recently, the field has achieved the status and gar-

nered the attention it deserves from healthcare professionals, policymakers, the public and the media. In 1998, the Veterans Health Administration launched a national program to help improve pain management in all VA facilities.

VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network has responded to this national campaign with a commitment to raise veterans' awareness of pain measurement and management. The Network offers pain-management education to patients, families and healthcare professionals and works to increase veteran access to pain specialists and new therapies. This includes using patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) pumps. These pumps help relieve pain after surgery and aid therapies provided by specialists in the outpatient setting.

Finding help

In spite of advances in pain treatment, some veterans are still living with uncontrolled pain. As America ages, chronic pain problems are becoming more common, and many think this is a normal part of getting older. This is not true. Pain at any stage of life needs to be evaluated, treated and controlled.

Getting pain under control starts with good communication between the patient and the healthcare provider. Providers can't always tell when a person is in pain. That's why it is important to let them know when and where pain is experienced.

VA's program "Pain, the Fifth Vital Sign" is designed to assess patient's discomfort by asking about their pain each time vital signs are taken.



Health professionals score pain on a scale, with 0 equal to no pain and 10 equal to extreme pain

Network healthcare professionals use a 0–10 scale to score pain. With this pain score and a complete evaluation, providers work with the patient to implement a pain treatment plan. A successful pain plan may take more than one visit and could require follow-up visits and adjustments in medication. If the first medication or therapy is not effective, other treatments can be tried until the pain is controlled.

An added assistance

Many experts suggest people use complementary therapies, such as yoga or meditation, along with pain medication to reduce pain. People shouldn't

feel uncomfortable telling their provider that they are using such a therapy. Exercise, relaxation techniques, stress reduction, mas-

sage, physical therapy, biofeedback and acupuncture are all effective treatments that empower people to conquer pain and take control of their lives.

Pain control involves evaluating lifestyle changes to reduce stress, restructuring the work and home environments to minimize activities that cause pain and finding ways to help alleviate pain before it becomes severe. Primary providers have the knowledge and experience to advise patients on the available treatments and how to include them into their pain plan. Life can never be completely free of pain; however, with treatment, you can control pain and enjoy life again.

Patients' Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

You have the right to:

- information and answers to your questions about pain and pain relief
- a health professional who will listen to your concerns regarding pain
- a quick response from your health professional when you report pain
- the best available pain relief treatments
- a commitment by your health professional to an effective pain relief plan

You have the responsibility to work with your health professional to:

- report pain that won't go away
- report your pain when it first begins
- help measure your pain
- discuss pain relief options
- make a pain relief plan
- follow the pain relief plan
- report unrelieved pain
- discuss any worries you have about taking pain medications

VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Vet Centers

Anaheim Vet Center

859 South Harbor Boulevard
Anaheim, CA 92805-5157
562-596-3101

Corona Vet Center

800 Magnolia Ave., Suite 110
Corona, CA 92879
909-734-0525

East Los Angeles Vet Center

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard
Suite 140
Commerce, CA 90022-5147
213-728-9966

Las Vegas Vet Center

1040 E. Sahara Avenue, Suite 1
Las Vegas, NV 89503
702-388-6369

Los Angeles Vet Center

1045 W. Redondo Beach Boulevard
Suite 150
Gardena, CA 90247-4129
310-767-1221

San Bernardino Vet Center

155 W. Hospitality Lane, Suite 140
San Bernardino, CA 92480
909-890-0797

San Diego Vet Center

2900 Sixth Avenue
San Diego, CA 92103-1003
619-294-2040

Santa Barbara Vet Center

1300 Santa Barbara Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101-2017
805-564-2345

Sepulveda Vet Center

9737 Haskell Avenue
Sepulveda, CA 91343-1618
818-892-9227

Vista Vet Center

1830 West Drive, Suites 103/104
Vista, CA 92083-6125
760-643-2070

West Los Angeles Vet Center

5730 Uplander Way, Suite 100
Culver City, CA 90230-6615
310-641-0326

VA Benefits Guide available in Spanish

VA's 2002 Benefits Guide is now available in Spanish at www.va.gov/pubaff/fedben/Fedbensp.pdf.



Watch for these symptoms

- a weak or interrupted stream of urine
- frequent urge to urinate, especially at night
- difficulty in starting to urinate
- blood or pus in the urine
- pain or burning upon urination
- continuing pain in the lower back, pelvis or upper thighs

Prostate cancer: Early detection saves lives

After skin cancer, prostate cancer is the second most common cancer in men. It's also the second most deadly (after lung cancer). The good news is that prostate cancer can be detected earlier than ever, when treatment is most likely to be effective.

What is the prostate gland?

The prostate gland is located under a man's bladder. The urethra (the duct that carries urine out of the body) passes through the prostate gland. That's why disorders of the prostate cause urinary symptoms such as decreased strength of urine stream, difficulty starting to urinate and painful urination.

The prostate gland plays an important role in reproduction, adding fluids to semen that, among

other things, appear to increase the ability of sperm to survive the journey toward the egg.

Diagnosing prostate cancer

Experts agree that the best way to find prostate cancer early is a combination of two tests. Together, these tests can pick up 70 percent of prostate cancers at a curable

stage. The first test is the digital rectal exam (DRE). In DRE, a doctor feels the prostate through the wall of the rectum to check for abnormalities. The second test is the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test. This blood test, which measures a protein made only by the prostate, can detect cancers at an earlier stage than ever before.

Treatment options

Once prostate cancer has been diagnosed, treatment depends on a number of factors—not only whether the cancer has spread, but also the man's age, health, expected life span and level of concern about possible side effects.

Radiation therapy and/or surgical removal of the prostate gland (and, if the cancer has spread, the testicles) may be recommended. Older men with small, slow-growing cancers may be monitored to determine if treatment might be needed later. New drug therapies to curb the growth of prostate cells are under investigation.

Guidelines for early detection: What the experts say

The American Cancer Society and American Urological Association recommend an annual DRE for men 40 and older and an annual PSA test for men 50 and older. Men at high risk (African Americans, those with a family history of prostate cancer or those with symptoms) should start getting regular PSA tests when they turn 40. If the results of either test are suspicious, further evaluation will be needed.

Taking charge of diabetes

By Elaine Lei

Uncontrolled diabetes can damage major organs such as the eye, kidney, heart and nerves. However, studies have shown that controlling the blood sugar level as normal as possible can prevent or delay most complications associated with diabetes. Here are some basics of diabetes self-management.

Your blood sugar goal

A healthy blood sugar range for people with diabetes is usually 80 mg/dl to 120 mg/dl fasting and a HgA1C of 6 percent to 7 percent. HgA1C is a very important blood test that needs to be done at your doctor's office. It shows your average blood sugar over the past two to three months. Depending on your other medical problems, your doctor may set a little higher range for you.

Follow these steps

Each VA facility has its own diabetes care team. By working closely with this team, you can learn to balance your meals, exercise and medication.

• **Get educated about diabetes.** It is the key to diabetes management. Your diabetes care team is your best source for learning.

• **Eat a healthy diet.** It is important to eat three regular meals daily with the right amount of starch. Don't skip or delay meals. Avoid sweets and eat less starchy food. Increase vegetables and fresh fruits in your diet; choose

lean meats and low-fat dairy. See a dietitian about a meal plan that fits your lifestyle and taste.

• **Increase exercise levels.**

Exercise can help lower your blood sugar, help control your weight and improve blood flow and blood pressure. To get the most benefit from exercise, you should do 20 to 40 minutes three to four times a week.

• **Take your medications regularly** and take them around the same time each day. When the pills are not enough to control the blood sugar, insulin injections are added.

• **Check your blood sugar at home.** Blood sugar testing helps you find out if you are taking the right amount of medicine and the right amount of food at the right time. Record your glucose results in a log or a diary. Work with your care team to

identify your glucose pattern and make adjustments accordingly. The VA supplies glucose meters and test strips to patients who need intense monitoring.

Work with your diabetes care team at your VA facility. Take control of your diabetes so it won't control you.

Be aware of low blood sugar

If you have diabetes, you need to watch out for low blood sugar. It is often caused by skipped or late meals, extra physical activity or too much diabetes medication. Symptoms include shakiness, sweating, fatigue, a fast heartbeat, confusion and dizziness. To treat low blood pressure, eat or drink something that has fast-acting sugar. That could be a tube of glucose gel, three to four glucose tablets, three to four ounces of fruit juice or regular soda, one cup of skim milk or three packets of sugar. Repeat the treatment every 15 minutes until you feel better and follow with a meal or a snack. Do not overtreat by eating a large meal.

VA recently announced that some veterans without any service-related medical problems would be charged new copayments for extended care. The new copayment is only expected to affect between 2,000 and 3,000 veterans currently receiving extended care. Copayments will be tailored individually to the economic situation of veterans and their families.

Veterans not required to make extended-care copayments include those with any compensable service-connected disability, those whose incomes are below the VA single pension level of \$9,556 and those who have received extended care from VA continu-

VA sets new extended-care copayments

ously since November 1999. Currently, higher income, nonservice-connected veterans pay \$5 per day, plus \$812 (Medicare deductible), for each 90 days of nursing home care. Under the new regulations, in any given 12-month period, veterans will get the first 21 days of care for free. A complex formula, varying from veteran to veteran, will help VA to individualize the copayments. Among the factors used to determine the copayment will be the veteran's income and assets, as well as a daily \$20 allowance. More information can be found at www.va.gov/publ/direc/health/direct/12002034.pdf.

Celebrate Fire Prevention Week

October 6–12 is Fire Prevention Week. The following tips will help you to protect yourself. Remember, prevention is the best way to help keep your home safe from fire.

Be kitchen wise.

Never leave cooking unattended. Wear clothes with tight fitting sleeves when you cook. Always set a kitchen timer to remind you to turn off the burners and oven. Keep stove surfaces free of clutter and grease buildup.

Be smoker wary. Use large, deep, nontipping ashtrays. Empty your ashtrays often and make sure to dampen the contents before dumping into the trash. Never smoke in bed. Remember that while drinking alcohol or taking medication, a common side effect is that you may become drowsy or disoriented.

Give space heaters space.

Keep electric portable space heaters

at least three feet from everything—including you! Just brushing against one could set your clothing on fire.

Install smoke detectors.

Be sure to install smoke detectors outside all sleeping areas and on every level of your home, including the basement. Test your detector monthly and change your batteries at least once a year. If you are hearing impaired, use a tested and approved smoke detector that triggers a strobe light.

Adapted from Lexington Fire Department website at ci.lexington.ma.us/Fire/firesafetyseniors.htm



Local news

RIVERSIDE AND CORONA

The Veterans Outreach Center serving Riverside County veterans has moved from Riverside to 800 Magnolia Avenue, Suite 110 in Corona, next door to the Corona VA Clinic. The Vet Center is part of the Department of Veterans Affairs continuing emphasis on making VA healthcare services more accessible and closer to veterans' homes. For more information or to reach the Corona Vet Center, call **909-734-0525**.

PASADENA

We are proud to announce the opening of a new VA community clinic in Pasadena at 1350 N. Altadena Drive. For more information, please call **626-296-9500**.

VA begins Phase II of CARES process

VA is beginning Phase II of its national initiative to ensure it meets the needs of veterans today and in the future. This is part of VA's healthcare planning process called Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES). Phase I was conducted in the Chicago area and was completed in February 2002. Phase II will include the rest of the VA healthcare system and is scheduled to be completed within two years.

VA launched CARES to help bring its aging healthcare system into the 21st century. The system was designed decades ago, when its primary focus was inpatient care, with long admissions for diagnosis and treatment. With changes in geographic concentrations of veterans and new methods of treatment, VA's medical system was not providing care as efficiently as possible and medical services were not always easily available to some veterans.

During the next 18 months, networks will collect data and facility information for planning initiatives. These will help VA provide the best care for veterans today and in the future. Veterans' and other stakeholders' opinions will be solicited as an important part of the decision process. Also important is the preservation of special services, such as those provided for paralyzed veterans. Once completed, an independent commission selected by the VA Secretary will evaluate the draft National CARES Plan. For more information on CARES, go to www.va.gov/CARES.

**We salute
our volunteers**

A 28-year record of service to veterans



Betty Bean

After retiring from a long nursing career, Betty Bean came to VA Long Beach Healthcare System as a volunteer in Chaplain Service in 1974. Betty felt the need to continue serving others, thus volunteering became a necessity to her. Betty has now accumulated more

than 35,000 hours helping patients and staff.

At age 90, Betty has decided to end her volunteer service. VA Long Beach Healthcare System and Voluntary Service are honored to pay tribute to Betty for her many years of dedicated service to veterans. Staff and patients praise Betty for possessing a kind heart and a sunny disposition, delivering a cheerful word along with the morning's coffee and being concerned for the veteran patient and staff. As well as volunteering, Betty served as the Deputy Representative for the Archdioceses for Military Service.

Betty has volunteered in many functions throughout her 28-year VA career. You may have seen her escorting patients to and from church services and working in Spinal Cord Injury. Betty was always willing to assist the patients in whatever way she can. Her commitment to serving our veteran patients serves as an inspiration to others.

To learn more about volunteering, please call Voluntary Services at your local VA healthcare facility.

It's time for your flu shot!

Visit your VA facility for a free flu shot.

VeteransDay

November 11, 2002
Honoring All Who Served

REACHING US IS EASY

★ VA Medical Centers

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System

Addelir D. Guy III
Ambulatory Care Center
1700 Vegas Drive
Las Vegas, NV 89106
702-636-3000

Mike O'Callaghan Federal Hospital

4700 Las Vegas Boulevard North
Las Vegas, NV 89191
702-653-3684

VA Loma Linda Healthcare System

11201 Benton Street
Loma Linda, CA 92357
909-825-7084

VA Long Beach Healthcare System

5901 East Seventh Street
Long Beach, CA 90822
562-494-2611

VA San Diego Healthcare System

3350 La Jolla Village Drive
San Diego, CA 92161
858-552-8585

VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System

11301 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90073
310-478-3711

▲ Community Clinics

Anaheim

1801 W. Romneya Drive
3rd Floor, Suite 303
Anaheim, CA 92801
714-780-5400

Antelope Valley

547 W. Lancaster Blvd.
Lancaster, CA 93536
661-729-8655

Bakersfield

1801 Westwind Drive
Bakersfield, CA 93301
661-632-1871

Cabrillo

2001 River Avenue
Long Beach, CA 90806
562-388-7900

California



Symbol Key

- ★ VA Medical Centers
- ▲ Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Chula Vista (South Bay)

835 3rd Avenue
Chula Vista, CA 91910
619-409-1600

Corona

800 Magnolia Avenue #101
Corona, CA 92879
909-817-8820

Culver City

3831 Hughes Avenue, Suite 104
Culver City, CA 90232
310-202-8223

East Los Angeles

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard #150
City of Commerce, CA 90040
323-725-7557

Escondido

815 East Pennsylvania Avenue
Escondido, CA 92025
760-745-2000

Gardena

1251 Redondo Beach Boulevard
3rd Floor
Gardena, CA 90247
310-851-4705

Henderson

Valley Parkway, Suite 215
Henderson, NV 89014
702-456-3825

Imperial Valley

528 G Street
Brawley, CA 92227
760-344-1881

Las Vegas

MASH Village
1581 N. Main Street
Las Vegas, NV 89101
702-386-3140

Lompoc

1111 E. Ocean Avenue, Suite 8
Lompoc, CA 93436
805-736-7767

Los Angeles

351 E. Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
213-253-5000

Mission Valley

8810 Rio San Diego Drive
San Diego, CA 92108
619-400-5000

Oxnard

250 W. Citrus Grove Avenue
Suite 150
Oxnard, CA 93030
805-983-6384

Palm Desert

41-865 Boardwalk, Suite 103
Palm Desert, CA 92211
760-341-5570

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System

Pahrump Medical Center

1430 E. Calvada Boulevard
Suite 100
Pahrump, NV 89048
775-751-2053

San Luis Obispo

1288 Moro St., #200
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
805-543-1233

Santa Ana

Bristol Medical Center
2740 S. Bristol Street
1st Floor, Suite 101
Santa Ana, CA 92704
714-825-3500

Santa Barbara

4440 Calle Real
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
805-683-1491

Sepulveda

16111 Plummer Street
Sepulveda, CA 91343
818-891-7711

Sun City

28125 Bradley Road
Suite 130
Sun City, CA 92586
909-672-1931

Upland

1238 E. Arrow Highway, No. 100
Upland, CA 91786
909-946-5348

Victorville

12138 Industrial Boulevard
Suite 120
Victorville, CA 92392
760-951-2599

Vista

1840 West Drive
Vista, CA 92083
760-643-2000

Whittier/Santa Fe Springs

10210 Orr and Day Road
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670
562-864-5565

Veterans' Health Today
5901 E. 7th St.
Long Beach, CA 90822

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